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ABSTRACT

The author explains the five-proposed approach to reading and spelling through classifying words into "simple," "fancy," "insane," "tricky," and "scrunched up" categories, and reports average gains of two grade levels in one semester by junior high school students with severe behavioral problems who learned the approach. Examples of the five word categories are "train" (simple), "precious" (fancy), "wuzz" for "was" (insane), "bare"/"bear" (tricky), and "hafta"/"have to" (scrunched up). Included are charts with columns of simple and fancy spelling, phonetic translations and foreign words, and words from the ad it world. (MC)

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English Spelling: The Simple,
The Fancy, The Insane, The Tricky,
and The Scrunched Up

by
Don McCabe

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AVKO "Great Idea" Reprint Series #612

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The "SIMPLE," the "FANCY,"
the "INSANE," the "TRICKY,"
and the "SCRUNCHED UP"

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3084 W. Willard Road
Birch Run, Mich. 48415-9444

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AVKO is a non-profit tax-exempt membership organization.

AVKO was founded in 1974.

AVKO is subsidized by donations and grants.

AVKO is open to membership to anyone interested in helping others learn to read and write.

AVKO is run by members from as far away as Montreal in Canada and San Rafael, California.

AVKO's daily operations are handled largely by volunteers who are aided by a small staff.

AVKO plans to build and operate a model reading research center in a YEAR-AROUND CAMP SETTING that would economically and efficiently service the needs of 10- 11- and 12-year-old dyslexic pre-delinquents.

AVKO hopes to spread the concept that parent and spouse tutoring in spelling/reading skills can be successfully taught in adult community education classes.

AVKO provides newsletters and economical opportunities to pursue individual research projects and to take part in large scale cooperative research projects that have immediate PRACTICAL applications.

AVKO is attempting to accomplish these goals primarily through the profits generated by the sale of services and special materials developed for the special needs of students, parents, and adults, but AVKO still needs donations to survive.

English Spelling:

The "SIMPLE," the "FANCY,"
the "INSANE," the "TRICKY,"
and the "SCRUNCHED UP"

In helping students overcome either reading or spelling problems I have found that it helps to classify words as "SIMPLE," "FANCY," or "INSANE." Learning to read and spell would be an easier task if all the words in our language followed the simple patterns that are in words such as:

for, little, cat, feet,
bike, all, us, miss, boat.

Unfortunately, we have words of the "FANCY" variety such as:

unique, precious, special,
bureau, chef, fatigue, religious

that do not follow the simple patterns normally taught in the first few grades.

I prefer to begin the teaching (or remediation) of reading and spelling with the simple regular words that follow consistent patterns. From these I select a word I want to teach. Let's suppose it's the Dolch word train.

Rather than just teach the word train in isolation by sight methods or by sounding it out in single letter phoneme-grapheme correspondences, I teach train in conjunction with as many -ain words as are in their vocabulary — or should be.

(See chart of -ain words on next page)

rain	rains	rained	raining	rainy
brain	brains	brained	braining	brainy
train	trains	trained	training	trainer
strain	strains	strained	straining	strainer
restrain	restrains	restrained		restraint
sprain	sprains	sprained	spraining	
grain	grains			
drain	drains			
gain	gains			
regain	regains	regained	regaining	
lain				
plain	plains			plainly
explain	explains	explained	explaining	

(These were selected from the -ain family on page 84 in WORD FAMILIES PLUS [Birch Run, Mich.: AVKO Educational Research Foundation], 1981.)

By teaching the "SIMPLE" words via a word family approach, other aspects of spelling and reading are being learned by my students without their being formally taught. For example, without realizing it, they are being drilled on initial consonants, consonant blends, consonant digraphs, vowel digraphs, prefixes, suffixes, as well as context and structural changes that affect meaning.

Again, using train as an example, I demonstrate to my students how the meaning of a word changes according to both context and structure as in the following word family in sentence context drill:

1. See the train.
2. See the bride's train.
3. See the bride train the groom.
4. I hope this little puppy has been trained.
5. How long has Mary been in training for the Olympics?

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE CHARTS can also be used in conjunction with teaching words via the word family approach. For example, I give a word such as brain (Note: the word brain is NOT on the Dolch list, but it is in everybody's speaking vocabulary) and ask for a sentence from the class.

Little Tommy Schmartalec in the back of the room says, "If you had a brain, you'd be dangerous."

We laugh, and then everyone attempts to write the sentence. My policy is that each student must at least attempt to spell each word even if it's only the initial letter followed by squiggles. (See sample below.)

After the students have written their individual versions of the sentence, I write the correct spelling on the chalkboard while they correct their own errors.

SAMPLE STUDENT MISSPELLING:

If you had brain you be dangerous

SAMPLE STUDENT CORRECTED SPELLING:

If you had a brain, you would be dangerous.

Note: In normal speech the word would is "SCRUNCHED UP" into "YOOD BE" which could be written as "you'd be." However, I don't teach contractions until the students know automatically what it is that they are "SCRUNCHING UP."

While I am teaching the "SIMPLE" words, expediency dictates that I teach the more commonly used "INSANE" words. But, I don't try to teach them all at one time. Instead, I slip them in, one at a time. In addition to the normal sight

word methods of teaching a word like does, I use special flash cards that can be used by students working in pairs. One tests the other by lifting his card so that only he can read what is on his side.

For example, Tommy looks at his card and sees "duzz" while Mary sees on the other side of the card the word "does."

1. Mary must read the word does.
2. Tommy, because he is learning the "SIMPLE" spellings, knows whether or not she read "duzz" correctly. Now it's his turn to correctly spell the word, whose correct spelling Mary has in front of her.

The rationale for giving a "fun NET tick" spelling for the word does is basically the same as that which Professor Downing uses to advocate his Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA).

I believe that using "SIMPLE" "fun NET tick" spellings with quotation marks to indicate that the spellings are incorrect is at least ten shades more practical than using a completely artificial alphabet that is of no use after the initial reading stages are over.

Students who become proficient ("pro FISH unt") at reading the simple phonic patterns can easily handle the deliberate misspellings writers often use to illustrate dialect or just to inject a little humor.

(See Sample Cards on Next Page)

2

Correct Spelling Side

"fun NET tick" side

was

"wuzz"

does

"duzz"

is

"izz"

one

"wun"

I also apply the same principles to PHRASE CARDS
for flashing and for spelling.

Correct Spelling Side

"fun NET tick" side

Was that Jack?

"Wuzz" that Jack?

No, it was Jill.

No, it "wuzz" Jill.

Does Tom know him?

"Duzz" Tom "no"him?

No, he doesn't.

No, he "duzzint"

As my students progress toward mastery over the "SIMPLE" and the more commonly used "INSANE" words, I begin introducing the concept that "FANCY" adult words have "FANCY" spellings.

This concept occurred to me as a result of working with Alfred N. I suspect that almost every teacher has had at least one student like Alfred. Alfred could spell the "SIMPLE" words. He knew his basic phonics. He could read at grade level, but his misspellings were simply "atroshus," "preshshuss," or simply "hill-airy-us" depending upon your point of view.

Alfred always knew which words he had misspelled in sentences such as:

Apples are delishuss.

We used a speshul teckneek to wax cars.

Dockturs aren't haff as nosie as sikiatrists.

Alfred also had the "pee-kyool-yur" ability of being able to score high on standardized spelling tests because he could "yoo-zhoo-ully" pick the correct spelling when given a "mull-tuh-pull" choice as in:

- (a) preicous (b) precuso (c) precious (d) percosi
(a) receive (b) recieve (c) receeve (d) resieve
(b) specail (b) special (c) sprecial (d) special

For quite a while I thought that the reason why Alfred would pick the correct response was because his personal "fun-net-tick" misspellings were never given as a choice. So, one day, I substituted one of his normal phonetic renditions for one of the incorrect spellings on every one of the test line items.

Would you believe it? Alfred rejected ALL his normal misspellings in favor of the correct spellings. When questioned about it, he said he could always recognize the right spelling when he saw it. It seems that Alfred had the ability to take tests that only demanded recognition recall.

Alfred knew the correct spelling when he saw it, but his power of visualization was too weak to help him when he was writing for himself.

The teacher Alfred had the year before told me that Alfred's problem was that he had had TOO MUCH PHONICS. I couldn't quite accept that premise, even though I have heard hundreds of other teachers and professors make such statements. Then, it occurred to me that just as people can be bi-lingual, they could just as well be "bi-phonc."

In fact, good readers are "naturally" bi-phonc without any special training just as many bi-lingual people are bi-lingual without any special training in one of the languages. For example, most good readers have been trained to respond automatically to the "SIMPLE" phonic patterns taught in most elementary school basal readers. However, these good readers WITHOUT special training have learned by themselves to respond automatically to the "FANCY" phonic patterns through THEIR OWN EXTENSIVE PERSONAL READING.

But not all students can learn without some formal instruction. Alfred was one who learned to read but not to spell these patterns without formal instruction.

weak and eek are examples of a "SIMPLE" pattern.
weak and week are examples of "SIMPLE" spellings.

I could toss in odd combinations of letters in front of -eek and -eak and Alfred could read the resulting jabberwocky such as:

The pleak neek started to deek & feak.

Alfred could read these jabberwocky words in or out of context provided they contained only "SIMPLE" patterns. However, he could not read such jabberwocky words as I have actually found in advertising as:

sizzl-icious
Jocque Shoppe
feminique

He could read words such as delicious but not "sizzl-icious." He could read his friend's name LaRocque but not the sign that said "Jocque Shoppe." He could read the word unique but not "feminique."

We educators have no problem with the "FANCY" -ique pattern in words such as:

unique
technique
antique
oblique
mystique
Angelique
Ma...nique

Somewhere along the line, we acquired the ability to decode and encode phonetic patterns such as this which had never been formally taught to us. We learned these on our own probably because we were avid readers and probably because we also had parents who could read and could correct us if we

happened to read the word chic as "chick" instead of as "sheek."

These patterns I arbitrarily have labeled as secondary phonic patterns when I write for scholars in their "scholarly" journals and as "FANCY" patterns when I write for people who actively are engaged in teaching real students with real problems.

As Alfred knew only the primary (or "SIMPLE") phonic patterns, I decided that in order to teach him I ought to emulate the bi-lingual teachers and teach him his second language ("FANCY" patterns) through his first ("SIMPLE.")

To help Alfred (and others who shared his problem to different extents), I began to formulate some very simple rules.

- RULE #1. SIMPLE words have SIMPLE spellings.
- RULE #2. FANCY words have FANCY spellings.
- RULE #3. When in doubt as to the spelling of a word, try the SIMPLE spelling. If it looks "funny," substitute one or more of the "FANCY" spellings for certain common sounds in the words.

To teach Alfred and my other students these rules and their practical applications, I devised a series of charts that I could refer to. I made no special attempt to get my students to memorize them or to even make them think that they had to learn them for a test.

But learn the rules they did. Mostly by osmosis.

(See following pages for example charts)

CHART #1

SOUND /us/

SIMPLE SPELLING

us, ss

EXAMPLES:

us
bus
Gus
thus
plus

muss
fuss
Russ
cuss
discuss

FANCY SPELLING

ous

EXAMPLES:

nervous
generous
famous
marvelous
tremendous
humorous
glamorous
dangerous
ridiculous
numerous
perilous

CHART #2

SOUND /sh/

SIMPLE SPELLING

sh

EXAMPLES:

fish
wish
dish

FANCY SPELLINGS

ci, (and several others)

EXAMPLES:

"shus"=cious	"shull"=cial	"shunt"=cient
precious	official	sufficient
delicious	racial	efficient
luscious	special	proficient
vicious	commercial	deficient
suspicious	crucial	inefficient
gracious	social	
spacious	artificial	

CHART #3

SOUND /un/

SIMPLE SPELLING

un

EXAMPLES:

fun
bun
gun
sun
run

FANCY SPELLING

on

EXAMPLES:

London	arson
button	parson
apron	Carson
pardon	Larson
common	Orson
won	Samson
person	carton
vixon	Burton
Nixon	Parton
cotton	
mutton	

CHART #4

SOUND /yun/

SIMPLE SPELLING

"yun"

EXAMPLES:

Not a single
word in the English
Language has the
"yun" sound spelled
-yun.

FANCY SPELLINGS

ion

EXAMPLES:

million
billion
trillion
stallion
onion
union
reunion
companion
rebellion

As you can guess, I have a drawer chuck full of charts. I use them to teach many words--not just an isolated rule and one isolated example or two. Just as I use my handy dandy AVKO WORD FAMILIES PLUS to teach as many of the simple -ain words as possible when I teach the Dolch word train, I use this book to find and teach as many fancy words as possible that follow the same particular "FANCY" spelling.

For example, to teach the ge digraph I first demonstrate the "SIMPLE" /j/ as illustrated by:

SIMPLE /j/= j

FANCY /j/ = ge

Jack

George

Then I review the "SIMPLE" -age, -adge, -edge, -idge, -arge, -urge, and -orge families which contain the ge digraph even though it didn't have to be taught that way earlier.

Then I quickly review the "FANCY" ways of spelling the /un/ sound and the /us/ sound so that it really makes sense that the "FANCY" sounds of /jus/ and /jun/ are spelled -geous and -geon as in:

SIMPLE /jus/

FANCY /jus/ -geous or -gious

No words in the English Language use jus or juss to spell the sound /jus/.
gorgeous religious
courageous contagious
advantageous prodigious

SIMPLE /jun/

FANCY /jun/ = geon

No words in the English Language use jun or junn to spell the sound /jun/.
surgeon
dungeon
pigeon
sturgeon
curmudgeon

SMALL DIGRESSION

There are many good techniques for teaching reading and spelling. I would like to think that you know and use most them, just as I do from the simple but effective hooking of student's on books a la Dan Fadar to psycholinguistics. So, just because I don't mention your favorite techniques and materials doesn't mean that I don't use them. It's just that I don't want to bore you with what you already know and use.

FANCY FLASHCARDS

I do have my own special set of flash cards on which I have their "FANCY" but correct spelling on one side and the "SIMPLE" but incorrect spelling in quotation marks on the other. Again, just like the cards for the "INSANE" words, one student can be tested for his reading while the other is tested on her spelling.

precious

"presh shus"

special

"spesh shull"

TEACHING THE HIGHER LEVEL "INSANE" WORDS

I feel strongly that no student (not even the gifted!) should have to take classes in French just so he can order a quiche ("keesh") -- and even that is no ironclad guarantee. I took two years of college French and although I learned to translate "My aunt's pen is on the desk" I did NOT learn how to read a regular menu with ease.

I also feel that no student should have to take Italian just so he can recognize the word ciao ("chow") and Opici ("oh peachy"). Nor should he have to take German so he can recognize auf wiedersehen ("oh VEE der Zane"), Yiddish to recognize clutzpah ("k-h-h-h-huuts puh"), Spanish to know that Jose ("HO ZAY") isn't a misspelling of Josie, Latin to understand tempus fugit, Greek to understand alpha ("Al Fuh") and omega ("oh MAY guh"), and Russian to know the letters CCCP on the jerseys of the Russian athletes represent SSSR (or USSR) because their alphabet is Cyrillic and not Roman.

So, in my classes I also teach words that come from the REAL ADULT WORLD of reading (catalogues, menus, business forms, billboards, advertisements, names, headlines, cartoons, etc.) On the wall above the chalkboard I hang the sign:

Adult vocabulary is not: See Spot run.

Let's learn to read and spell ADULT words.

Once a day I introduce a new, slightly "INSANE" adult word. One day it might be filet mignon ("Phil LAY mean Yoan") which would also be taught and reviewed as an example of such "FANCY" patterns as:

"FANCY" pattern**Sample Words**

i=LONG E	Mimi, fiancée, filet mignon
e=LONG A	entrée, debut, filet mignon
et=LONG A	effet, valet, filet mignon
g=null	align, impugn, filet mignon

The next day I might introduce any one (AND ONLY ONE) of the following words: adieu ("uh dYOO"), cache ("cash"), chamois ("shammy"), coup ("coo"), cliché ("klee SHAY"), crepe ("crape"), jai alai ("high lie"), Jesus Garcia ("Hey ZEUS Gar See yuh"), or lasagna (luh ZAHN yuh").

I don't spend a great deal of time on each new word. It's NOT the length of time spent on learning a word that counts. It's the number of times. So I give a quick definition and then flash the word several times. Only, I don't use a normal flash card. I use a large card on which I have pasted the page from a newspaper, magazine, catalogue, menu, etc. on which the word occurs in big bold print. The word is then highlighted in yellow so it stands out from the rest of the words but is still in an actual ADULT CONTEXT.

At the end of the hour I always (or almost always) have a quick word identification drill of all the "INSANE" words we have been adding to our list day by day. I choose the end of the hour because my classes are individualized during the bulk of the class hour. I use structured drills for the first five minutes (AVKO Sequential Spelling) to help build self confidence in handling "SIMPLE" patterns and to create a structured environment. My students know that they must have their books open and ready to write the moment the bell rings. After that, they have individual assignments as I work individually with students. Then, to prevent chaos ("Kay OSS") when the bell rings with everybody stampeding out of the room

with materials scattered hither and yon, I have my students put away their work neatly about five minutes BEFORE the bell. Then I work on the "INSANE" words.

If any student can correctly call 15 words in succession, I give him an award. One year, as an experiment at the Alternative Junior High in Flint, Michigan, I used quarters from a special incentive fund provided by the AVKO Foundation as awards. The first student who could find the newly assigned "INSANE" word in any adult reading material EXCEPT reference works such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc., received a similar award -- in this case, \$1.00.

TEACHING THE "TRICKY" WORDS

The "TRICKY" Words are simply those homonyms that "trick" students such as bare/bear, see/sea, deer/dear, accept/except, etc. To teach these words I developed student self-corrected exercises in which I dictated sentences using the words. In the process of developing a list of words to use, I found well over a thousand word groupings that can "TRICK" people. It is this list that became the core for the exercises called oddly enough, The "TRICKY" Words and which is now available from the AVKO Foundation.

TEACHING THE "SCRUNCHED UP" WORDS

Because when we write, we in effect are dictating to ourselves in our normal speech, I try to dictate sentences in the same normal sloppy manner so that my students get good practice in converting the normal "scrunched up" speech into correct spelling. For example:

(See Chart on following page)

We say:

hafta
sposta
should of
Jeet jet
Node Jew
Whudja git
usta

We should spell:

have to
supposed to
should have
Did you eat yet?
No, did you?
What did you get?
used to

I used quick one or two sentences dictated daily in which the students thought they were being tested on specific words, such as the "TRICKY" accept/except but because they had to correct their spellings, the students soon learned to insert automatically the "SCRUNCHED UP" words as in: "Thair never gonna axsept ol' Tom." should be written: They're never going to accept old Tom.

The direct result of using this five pronged approach to reading and spelling at the Flint Alternative Junior High School (a school for students with severe behavioral problems) resulted in spectacular gains for almost all the students. The average gain in one semester was 2.0 grade levels.

It is doubtful whether or not it can be scientifically established that the causative agent for the gains was any one of the many types of materials or any one of the techniques as so many different materials and techniques were being used during the course of any one hour of reading instruction.

I believe that I am able to get such good results because I use the "SIMPLE, FANCY, INSANE, TRICKY, and SCRUNCHED UP" approach in much the same way as nutritionists use vitamin supplements and farmers use fertilizer. I use the approach to supplement--not to supplant normal procedures.

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all tall stall install installment call recall

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